DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 885 CS 507 363

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TITLE An Outline of Rehearsal Procedures for Solo Performances in the Beginning Interpretation Classroom.
PUB DATE 4 Nov 90
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (76th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4, 1990).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; Higher Education; *Oral Interpretation; *Speech Instruction; Speech Skills
IDENTIFIERS Narrative Text; *Oral Presentations; *Rehearsal Strategies; Text Factors

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of rehearsal procedures designed to provide instructors and students of the beginning interpretation class with a concrete, consistent framework for preparing literature for solo classroom performance. The outline offers a five-step process, and discusses each step in the process. First, the student must select a literary text that is within the range of the student's analytic and performance abilities, which fulfills the requirements of the assignment, and in which the student is willing to make the personal investment that performance requires. Second, the student must achieve an understanding of the literary text, based upon a critical method that is appropriate to the text and the assignment. Third, the student must memorize the literary text. Fourth, the student must select specific performance choices with which to present the literary text, considering psychological, physical, and vocal choices, and beginning rehearsal sessions with physical and vocal warmups. Lastly, the student must "set" the performance choices and polish the performance, rehearsing before others and in the performance space. (SR)

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An Outline of Rehearsal Procedures for Solo Performances in the Beginning Interpretation Classroom

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A paper presented at the
Speech Communication Association Convention
Chicago, Illinois
Sunday, November 4, 1990

CS507363

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Introduction

This paper presents an outline of rehearsal procedures based upon data gathered and interpreted during my dissertation work, completed at Southern Illinois University (Siddens, 1989), and articulates pedagogical strategies that are embedded in those procedures. The general intent is to provide instructors and students with a rationale of the advocated rehearsal procedures. The paper will (1) articulate the outline of rehearsal procedures, (2) discuss each step in the rehearsal process and (3) provide a summary and conclusion.

An Outline of Rehearsal Procedures

The rehearsal procedures suggested by this paper emerge from a synthesis of students' narrative descriptions of their experiences in rehearsal and the perspective of the interpretation discipline toward preparing literature for performance gathered through basic interpretation textbooks and research articulated through journal articles (Siddens, 1989). The outline of rehearsal procedures is intended to provide instructors and students with a concrete, consistent framework for preparing literature for performance.

This rehearsal outline is based on mutual respect for two of the prime components of performance: the text and the performer. Respect for the text is evidenced through the emphasis placed upon the importance of textual selection and analysis. Respect for the performer is evidenced through the emphasis given individual choice in the selection of performance behaviors. The

outline serves as a framework for (1) specifying for students and instructors distinct procedures in the rehearsal process that are realistic and replicable, (2) providing students and instructors with concrete strategies with which to carry out those steps, and (3) creating a bridge between the theoretical claims of the Interpretation discipline and the real-world concerns beginning interpretation students face in rehearsal.

I. The student must select a literary text based upon the following criteria:
   A. The literary text must be within the range of the student´s analytic abilities.
   B. The literary text must be within the range of the student´s performance abilities.
   C. The student must be willing to make the personal investment in the literary text that performance requires.
   D. The literary text must fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

II. The student must achieve an understanding of the literary text, based upon a critical method that is appropriate to the text and the assignment.

III. The student must memorize the literary text.

IV. The student must select specific performance choices with which to present the literary text.
   A. Rehearsal sessions should begin with physical and vocal warmups.
   B. The student should consider psychological choices.
   C. The student should consider physical choices.
   D. The student should consider vocal choices.

V. The student must "set" the performance choices and polish the performance.
   A. Rehearsal sessions should begin with physical and vocal warmups.
   B. The student should rehearse before others.
   C. The student should rehearse in the performance space.

This paper will now examine these rehearsal procedures.

Selecting a Literary Text

The first topic instructors should approach in their discussion of rehearsal is the relationship between textual selection and rehearsal. It should be pointed out to students that they will not only try out performance choices as they prepare for performance, they will also initially examine a number of literary texts until they discover an appropriate text for their performance. Textual selection is a significant part

of the process of preparing to perform and some important guidelines exist to consider when selecting a text for performance. Students should be advised of the following four criteria for textual selection.

First, if the student does not understand the literary text and does not possess the life experience and/or analytic ability to understand the text, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for that student to make appropriate performance choices. Confusion concerning the meaning of a literary text will lead to confusion and ambiguity in performance. Lack of ability to achieve analytic understanding can also lead to a lack of desire to work with a literary text. It is necessary, therefore, for the student to select a text that is analytically accessible. The more concrete the textual understanding, the more concrete the performance choices can be and the more likely the student will work with the selection.

Second, the student should not select literary texts that offer performance possibilities that are entirely beyond a student's talents and capabilities. It will be difficult for the student to present such a text in performance. This is not to say that students should select texts that are easy for them to perform. A balance must be achieved in which a student is challenged by the performance possibilities of a literary text, but not intimidated by the difficulties of the text. If the student feels challenged by the literary text, he or she will be excited by the process of exploring the text and making appropriate performance choices.

Third, the student should respond positively to the literary text; it should have personal appeal to the student. Students should be advised that rehearsal and performance require a personal investment on the part of the performer to be the most successful. The time and energy required by performance are considerable. The more time and energy that are invested in rehearsal, the greater the return on that investment. This personal investment begins with an inner desire to do well, whether motivated by the desire to receive a good grade or to excel for artistic reasons. It is only natural that individuals put more effort into activities that they enjoy, and students will be more likely to make that personal investment in rehearsal if they like the text that they perform.

The fourth criterion that should be addressed with students regarding textual selection is adherence to assignment requirements. Students should make sure that the literary text they select fulfills the guidelines for their performance assignment. Instructors should make sure as well that they are specific and concrete in describing their expectations for each performance assignment.

Textual selection provides the foundation of a good performance and the four criteria for textual selection identified above are all necessary components in building that foundation. If any of the components is missing, the performance will not be as strong as it could be.

Textual Analysis

Instructors of the beginning interpretation course should next direct students' attention to textual analysis and the significant relationships that exist among analysis, rehearsal and performance. Analysis allows students to gain an understanding of literary texts. It is virtually impossible to make appropriate performance choices without analytic understanding. In order for performers to discover behaviors and values that will appropriately match their text, some understanding of the text must be achieved. Textual analysis allows performers to define the meaning, values and structure of literary texts. Once this information has been gathered and defined, performers may then begin to experiment in rehearsal with behaviors that appropriately embody or match their analytic understanding of that text. Textual analysis is a significant part of the rehearsal process, for it provides performers with the necessary information for matching performance behaviors to the literary text.

Many critical methods, such as dramatistic, biographical, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist criticism, are available to performers. Instructors can take any one into the beginning interpretation course; each provides students' with a deeper understanding of literary texts. Many practitioners have found dramatism a highly appealing analytic method to use in the interpretation classroom. Its appeal is found in the fact that it leads to textual insights in a language that translates quite easily into performance terms. This in part explains why so many

basic interpretation textbooks [e.g., Campbell (1968), Mattingly and Grimes (1970), Maclay and Sloan (1972), Long and HopKins (1982), and Yordon (1982)] advocate dramatism as a critical model.

Students should also be advised that textual analysis extends beyond the process of silent reading. Performance itself is also a method of critical analysis. HopKins (1981) describes how performance is a valuable critical tool. Performance is a personal, authentic mode of experience. Through performance students can experience for themselves personally the world of the literary text, immersing themselves in its characters, situations, values and structure. The experience with the text is direct and the student does not have to rely on the reports of others for information about the text. The distance between the student and text is minimized, allowing the student to experience and understand the text on a personal level.

Whatever method an instructor advocates, however, will guide performers' physical and vocal choices. The validity of performance behaviors emerges from a thorough and complete critical understanding of the literary text. Therefore, it is encumbent upon instructors to point out to students the relationship between textual analysis and performance and to explicate as clearly and precisely as possible the steps that students must follow to use properly the advocated critical method.

Memorization of the Literary Text

Although memorization typically is not the central concern of experienced performers during the rehearsal process, it is a major consideration for many beginning interpretation students. Instructors of the beginning interpretation course should strive to defuse this concern. Furthermore, they should stress the significant benefits of memorization and the importance of maintaining a proper perspective on the place of memorization in rehearsal.

Some instructors of the beginning interpretation course may not require memorization of the text. If so, this step in the rehearsal process will, of course, be bypassed. However, many beginning course instructors do require that performances be memorized. Requiring memorization for all classroom performances has some significant benefits. First, memorization requires that students invest time and effort in the rehearsal process. The advantages of spending time and effort in rehearsal and the potential return on that investment have already been mentioned. Second, freedom from the text leads to a greater possible range of physical motion and blocking choices. Third, memorization engenders a different mode of understanding between the performer and the literary text. Performance might be considered a method of "trying on" a point of view or "becoming" another individual. The more time and effort that is spent in this activity, the more knowledge about personae it is possible to gain.

Memorization also places the textual discourse literally in the mind of the performer and opens more possibilities for

understanding and adopting the point of view of the persona in the text. As HopKins (1981) points out, performance is a way of knowing. The closer the performer comes to the text, the more opportunities there are to discover textual insights and to gain an understanding of the literary text. In essence, memorization decreases the distance between performer and text, thereby increasing the opportunities performers have to understand the text.

Assuming memorization is required, instructors should carefully present this topic to students. Students often consider memorization to be the primary task of rehearsal, demanding the majority of their rehearsal time. It is important, therefore, that instructors stress the place of memorization in rehearsal. Three factors will help instructors with this task.

First, students should be advised that memorization is just one component of the rehearsal process; it is not the major thrust of rehearsal. Once the literary text is selected and analyzed, the primary function of the rehearsal process is to discover the mental processes and physical and vocal performance behaviors that will best embody that literary text. Along the way, memorization should take place.

Second, memorization is a mental process. Students have a great deal more control over the process of memorizing then they might realize. Memorization will occur almost naturally, through exposure to the literary text while analyzing and then making performance choices. Rather than focusing on how supposedly difficult and time-consuming memorization is, students should be

encouraged to relax with the process, allow themselves plenty of time to work with the text and be advised to maintain a positive attitude toward the process. Students who tell themselves that they are slow studies may be creating a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Third, personal investment again becomes relevant. As previously mentioned, if ample time and effort are invested in the text, memorization will occur almost automatically. In one sense, the text will become a part of the student's consciousness through the rehearsal process itself. However, this requires a personal investment on the part of the student, a willingness to invest that time and effort and a positive attitude toward the rehearsal process and memorization.

Selecting Performance Behaviors

As the student memorizes the text, he or she should also begin to consider and select physical and vocal performance behaviors. This process is really the heart of rehearsal. At this point the student operationalizes his or her analytical understanding of the literary text. The student selects physical and vocal performance behaviors that represent the student's understanding of the literary text.

Instructors should advise their students that performance choices include: (1) physical aspects of performance, such as, gestures, facial expressions and blocking, (2) vocal aspects of performance, such as, pitch, volume and rate, and (3) mental aspects of performance, such as, motivation, attitude and values. Instructors need to encourage students to consider and plan

specific and concrete perfomance choices across all three aspects of characterization: the mental, physical and vocal. Students should be encouraged to begin their process of selecting performance choices with the mental aspects and then they should move from the mental to the physical and vocal. A clear picture of the speaker´s psychological make-up and motivations provides a basis with which to consider appropriate physical and vocal behaviors. In most cases, human beings physically and vocally mirror their mental states. For instance, if an individual is depressed or sad, then the person may frown and assume a slumping posture. The person might also express agitation or resignation through their tone of voice.

Setting Performance Behaviors

Once the student has decided upon specific mental, physical and vocal behaviors, the student must practice those behaviors a number of times to set them or to commit them to memory so that the performance will appear smooth, spontaneous and natural. A particularly useful method of honing a performance is to rehearse before other people. This rehearsal step should be discussed and advocated in the classroom. Such a strategy not only gives students an opportunity to set their performance choices, but it also provides students with a rehearsal context that simulates performance conditions. There is a distinct difference between rehearsing alone and rehearsing in front of an audience. Rehearsing and performing before others creates a different sense of self-awareness in individuals because audiences create

tensions in performers that generally do not exist when individuals rehearse or perform alone. Rehearsing before others may help novice performers desensitize themselves to performing in front of audiences. Students might also be encouraged to organize "workshop" sessions outside class in which they rehearse before one another and offer each other suggestions and support.

Present day video and audio technology also provides students with opportunities to record their rehearsals and play them back for observation. Such strategies do not necessarily create the full sense of an audience-centered performance situation, but they do provide students with a method of systematically observing their performances, and enable them to reflect on the choices they have made and the manner in which they are carrying out those choices. In addition, the camera and/or tape-recorder might create for the performer some sense of audience presence.

Students can also perform before mirrors to check their performance choices. Such a strategy requires that students split their attention between what they are doing in rehearsal and the observation process, but it can provide a useful and readily available diagnostic tool, particularly in regard to physical choices. In a similar vein, the tape-recorder offers an opportunity to check vocal choices without requiring a split of the performer's attention, as the performer can listen to the playback after each trial performance. The primary advantage of mirrors and tape-recorders is that while video technology is not yet available to every student, most people do have access to

mirrors and tape-recorders.

Instructors should strongly emphasize the importance of the process of setting performance behaviors and the vital role rehearsing before others can play in that process. Rehearsing before others can help desensitize students to the process of performing before others and can provide them valuable feedback regarding their performance choices.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an outline of rehearsal procedures constructed to aid students of the beginning interpretation class in preparing solo classroom performances. It is also intended to help instructors of the beginning interpretation class organize their discourse related to rehearsal for classroom performances. The outline offers students a five-step process: (1) select a text, (2) analyze the text, (3) memorize the text, (4) select performance choices and (5) set the perfomance choices.

Rehearsal is a rich topic that deserves more attention from scholars in the interpretation discipline. Teaching students the concept of studying literary texts through performance calls for a common vocabulary with which to discuss rehearsal and a firm grasp of the theoretical and practical issues relevent to rehearsal. Such a vocabulary and such a grasp of pertinent issues will only come from further exploration of the rehearsal process. These procedures should allow instructors of the beginning interpretation course to provide more concrete and precise discourse for their students on the topic of rehearsal.

The advocated strategies will help alleviate ambiguity in the students' minds concerning how to prepare literature for performance. Much more, however, remains to be done.

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